



Refugee Council of Australia

BULLETIN FOR MEMBERS AND SUPPORTERS

November 6, 2008

Welcome to the latest bulletin from the Refugee Council of Australia. We welcome feedback, ideas or information worth sharing. Please contact us at info@refugeecouncil.org.au.

Paul Power, CEO, Refugee Council of Australia

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NEWS FROM THE REFUGEE COUNCIL

Immigration Minister to speak at RCOA annual general meeting

Minister for Immigration and Citizenship, Senator Chris Evans, will be guest speaker at RCOA's annual general meeting at Parramatta (NSW) on Monday, November 17. Senator Evans will speak on the topic "Refugee Policy under the Rudd Government", reflecting on the 12 months since the Federal election. The event will be held at Parramatta Town Hall, 182 Church Street Mall, from 2pm, with the AGM to follow at 3.45pm. To RSVP for the event, contact RCOA at admin@refugeecouncil.org.au or on (02) 9211-9333. For more details, see the AGM flyer - <http://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/who/agm.html>

Annual consultations on Australia's refugee and humanitarian program

Each year, RCOA conducts consultations across Australia to gather information for a submission for the Minister for Immigration and Citizenship on issues to consider in developing the next financial year's Refugee and Humanitarian Program. These consultations provide an opportunity for people to comment on all aspects of Australia's refugee program – from the processing of refugee and humanitarian visas, cultural orientation, travel to Australia, on-arrival settlement services, onshore protection visa issues and long-term refugee settlement issues. RCOA staff members are travelling to 11 cities around Australia to hold consultations with refugee community representatives, service providers and interested citizens. In addition, a series of five teleconferences will be held to gather opinion from different areas of rural and regional Australia. Details of the 30 public consultations and five teleconferences can be found at <http://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/resources/consultations.html>

UNHCR annual Executive Committee (ExCom) meeting

From October 6 to 10 2008, the senior leadership of UNHCR and representatives of 132 governments, 18 UN and intergovernmental organisations and 26 NGOs gathered in Geneva for UNHCR's annual Executive Committee (ExCom) meeting. The Australian delegation was led by Deputy Secretary of the Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC), Peter Hughes, and included three NGO observers: Paul Power (RCOA), David Manne (Refugee and Immigration Legal Centre) and Sarah Elliott (Austcare). Challenges discussed at ExCom included:

- the continued increase in forced displacement, particularly the growth in numbers of internally displaced persons (IDPs);
- the reintegration of refugees who are returning voluntarily to their countries of origin after conflict, ensuring they can earn a living and have access to basic health care;
- the impact on refugee and IDP populations of the increasing costs of food and fuel;
- how the global economic crisis (which gathered pace as ExCom progressed) would affect refugee and IDP populations and humanitarian operations; and
- the anticipated impact of forced migration resulting from climate change.

Among the positive trends discussed were Tanzania's granting of citizenship to 170,000 Burundian refugees displaced since 1972, improvements in UNHCR's approach to resettlement and successes in voluntary returns in Latin America, West Africa and elsewhere. In 2007, more than 70,000 refugees and 2 million IDPs returned voluntarily to their places of origin. High Commissioner Antonio Guterres

Suite 4A6, 410 Elizabeth Street
Surry Hills NSW 2010 Australia
Phone: (02) 9211-9333 • Fax: (02) 9211-9288
info@refugeecouncil.org.au • Web: www.refugeecouncil.org.au
Incorporated in ACT • ABN 87 956 673 083

The Refugee Council of Australia represents
non-government organisations and
individuals working with and for refugees
in Australia and around the world

praised the “very good news from Australia” about policy changes which, he observed, resulted in a “strengthening of asylum”. Later, in welcoming Australian Ambassador Caroline Millar’s appointment as Vice Chair of ExCom, Mr Guterres said: “Australia today is a very important example of best practice in asylum policy.” A report on the 2008 ExCom meeting will be on the RCOA website in coming weeks. UNHCR’s ExCom documents can be found at <http://www.unhcr.org/excom/486c900d2.html>

Report of 2008 UNHCR global consultation with NGOs

Among the reports delivered at the UNHCR ExCom meeting was a report on UNHCR’s 2008 NGO Consultations from rapporteur James Thomson of the National Council of Churches in Australia. These consultations were held in Geneva in June and included 22 representatives from Australia. James’ report can be found at <http://www.icva.ch/doc00000807.html>

The Australian Refugee Rights Alliance, a loose network which brings together Australian organisations interested in advocacy with UNHCR, has a detailed report of the NGO Consultations, outlining the agenda, key areas of discussion, outcomes and observations. A full copy of the report, is available at <http://www.crr.unsw.edu.au/documents/ARRA%20Main%20Report%202008%20.pdf>

Statistics fail to justify media obsession with boat arrivals

It was ironic that, while representatives of UNHCR, governments and NGOs were at the UNHCR ExCom meeting discussing the forced displacement of millions of people, the Australian media were giving great prominence to the recent arrival in Australian waters of two boatloads carrying 31 asylum seekers. By any measure, the number of people arriving in Australia by boat to seek asylum is tiny. UNHCR reports that, at the end of 2007, there were 739,986 asylum seekers around the world with claims still pending. Australia had just 1516 people in this category (0.2% of the global total). During 2007, 468,597 asylum seekers were granted refugee status. Of these people, 1702 (or 0.4%) were granted protection in Australia. Of the relatively small numbers of people who seek asylum in Australia, the great majority arrive by air, generally with a valid short-term visa of some description, and have their protection visa application assessed with no public fanfare. Asylum seekers who arrive in Australia by boat currently make up fewer than 0.01% of the world’s asylum seekers.

Input sought for research on sport’s role in assisting refugee settlement

Agencies which support the settlement of refugees have increasingly recognised sport as a useful tool for assisting refugees to settle more effectively. However, there are many factors which limit refugees’ participation in organised sport, such as language barriers, financial constraints and a lack of culturally-appropriate sport programs. RCOA is undertaking a research project, with the financial support of the NSW Government, to determine the most effective strategies for overcoming these obstacles and increasing refugees’ participation in sport. We are currently seeking information about sport programs which target refugees. If you have any information to offer, please contact Natalie Gooch or Lucy Morgan on (02) 9211 9333 or by e-mail at info@refugeecouncil.org.au

Introduction of Complex Case Support (CCS) for new entrants

Parliamentary Secretary for Multicultural Affairs and Settlement Service, Laurie Ferguson MP has announced the introduction of Complex Case Support services that aim to provide specialised and intensive case management support to humanitarian entrants with exceptional needs. The service will provide additional support only where the needs of clients extend beyond the scope of existing settlement and mainstream services, and is designed to deliver flexible, tailored and local responses to the individual needs of each case. The Department of Immigration will be holding information sessions for service providers and have developed a brochure that explains CCS in more detail and how clients can be referred to the service. For details, see <http://www.immi.gov.au/living-in-australia/delivering-assistance/government-programs/settlement-programs/ccs.htm>

Employment opportunities

RCOA promotes job opportunities being advertised by member organisations – and occasionally other opportunities which might be of interest to people of refugee background. Currently, our employment page includes positions advertised by settlement services in several states and opportunities for people interested in becoming interpreters in one of a number of community languages. For more information, see <http://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/getinvolved/employment.html>

COMING EVENTS

Saturday 18 October to Saturday 8 November – Sydney

Play: Family Stories – Belgrade by Biljana Srbljanovic

Venue: SBW Stables Theatre, 10 Nimrod Street, Kings Cross NSW 2011

Details: for all further information and ticketing details please go to the website: <http://www.griffintheatre.com.au>

The Refugee Council of Australia would particularly like to thank the producers of **Family Stories – Belgrade** for providing tickets for refugees at their preview performances last month.

Thursday 6 November – Sydney

Seminar: Climate Change and Sustainable Development – Challenges for the Pacific

Venue: Faculty of Law Building, UNSW, Kensington Campus

Details: 3.00pm to 7.00pm (including afternoon tea). Free event, but registration is essential by 31 October 2008 at: <http://www.law.unsw.edu.au>

Tuesday 11, Wednesday 12, Friday 21 & Saturday 22 November – Melbourne

Various Performances: Listen to Us!

Presented by the Victorian Immigrant and Refugee Women's Coalition.

Venue: Queen Victoria Women's Centre, 210 Lonsdale Street, Melbourne

Details: Times vary for each performance so please visit www.virwc.org.au for all details. RSVP essential.

Thursday 20 November – Sydney

STARTTS 20th Anniversary Celebration

Venue: Grand Paradiso Room, 118 Ware Street, Fairfield, Sydney.

Details: 10.30am; for further information please visit: www.startts.org.au

Thursday 20 & Friday 21 November – Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

Conference: Asia Pacific Consultation on Refugee Rights

For all details and registration by 1 November, please visit:

<http://sites.google.com/site/apcrr2008/registration-form>

Wednesday 26 November – Melbourne

Seminar: Researching services for survivors of torture and trauma – a preliminary investigation about recovery outcomes. Presented by Latrobe University Refugee Health Research Centre with Dr Colleen McFarlane and Dr Ida Kaplan

Venue: Foundation House, 6 Gardiner Street, Brunswick

Details: Registration 5.00pm, Seminar: 5.30pm to 6.30pm; for further information contact rhc@latrobe.edu.au or Tel: 03 9479 5874 or visit www.latrobe.edu.au/rhc/conferences.html

Thursday 28 & Friday 29 November – Brisbane

Conference: Australian National Refugee Primary Health Care Conference

Venue: Brisbane Convention & Entertainment Centre

For more details on how to register and for a conference program go to the website: <http://www.materonline.org.au/Home/Events/QIRCH-2008-conference.aspx>

NEW RESEARCH, STATEMENTS AND PUBLICATIONS

Documentary Screening: A Well Founded Fear

Screening on SBS TV on **Wednesday 19 November** at 8.30pm EST, this documentary follows Phil Glendenning, Director of the Edmund Rice Centre for Social Justice, as he tracks down several rejected asylum seekers to find out how they are faring. These asylum seekers were former Nauru detainees.

New report: "New Future: The Queensland Government's Engagement with African Refugees"

Launched by Queensland Premier Anna Bligh, this report outlines ways to combat discrimination and improve access to services for the 5000 African refugees and humanitarian entrants who have settled

in Queensland in the last five years. A full copy of the report is available from <http://www.multicultural.qld.gov.au/publications/reports/new-futures.pdf>

Trafficking research underway at the University of Queensland

Dr Andreas Schloenhardt, a lecturer at UQ will conduct the first comprehensive and comparative analysis of the exploitation of foreign sex workers and trafficking in persons – especially women and children – in Australia and Canada. Dr Schloenhardt has said that despite greater awareness of the issue among government agencies, trafficking in persons remained a phenomenon not well understood and poorly researched. Go to the website <http://www.uq.edu.au/news/index.html?article=16004> for further information about the research.

New book: The Bitter Shore

Darlinghurst journalist and lawyer Jacquie Everitt has learned a lot in the past 15 years. She's now penned *The Bitter Shore*, a harrowing account of an Iranian family's flight from political persecution and their detention in Australia. Published by Pan Macmillan.

New report: Freedom, Respect, Equality, Dignity: Action

This is the major NGO Report to the UN Human Rights Committee regarding Australia's implementation of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. The Report was contributed to by over 50 NGOs with specific human rights and subject matter expertise, and is supported in whole or in part by over 200 NGOs. Go to the website for a full copy of the report: http://www.hrlrc.org.au/html/s02_article/article_view.asp?id=380&nav_top_id=-1&nav_cat_id=-1

Campaign to increase funding for social housing

Shelter NSW has initiated a campaign to increase Government funding for social housing and is urging others to support their efforts by writing a letter or contacting your local MP to encourage the adoption of a series of recommendations. Please visit www.sheltersnsw.org.au for further information and ways to become involved.

New resources: NSW Office of Industrial Relations

Please visit www.industrialrelations.nsw.gov.au for information on some new resources available to assist CALD communities and people working in the community sector. The resources are designed for job seekers and workers; students and people looking to return to work.

REFUGEE ISSUES IN THE MEDIA

A busy person's digest of some of the recent Australian media coverage of refugee issues:

(Inclusion in this summary does not imply that RCOA agrees with the article's content or vouches for its accuracy)

Sixty corpses washed onto beach in Yemen

Sixty corpses of asylum seekers from Somalia and Ethiopia were found on a beach in Yemen after smugglers forced many of them overboard, aid agency Medecins Sans Frontieres (MSF) reported. MSF said the latest victims on the notoriously perilous smuggling route had come across the Gulf of Aden from the Somali port city of Bosaso, fleeing war and poverty at home. (*News Ltd, 3 November*)

Indonesia intercepts more Australia-bound asylum seekers

Indonesian authorities have detained at least 20 asylum seekers who were about to head to Australia. The 12 Afghans and eight Pakistanis were arrested early on 2 November. Indonesian Police say they were attempting to travel by boat from West Java to Christmas Island. Ten Indonesians described as the boat's owners and crew were also detained. (*ABC News, 3 November*)

Afghans sent home to die, documentary claims

Immigration Minister Chris Evans will investigate allegations that up to 20 Afghan asylum seekers rejected by Australia under the Howard Government's so-called 'Pacific Solution' were killed after returning to Afghanistan. The claims are in a documentary to be aired on SBS Television on 19 November called 'A Well-Founded Fear', produced by Ann Delaney. (*Sydney Morning Herald, 27 October*)

Australian Human Rights Commission condemns detention centre conditions

Mandatory detention should be abolished, the Australian Human Rights Commission said at an inquiry into immigration detention in Australia. At a public hearing in Sydney, Human Rights Commissioner Graeme Innes, described Sydney's Villawood Detention Centre as the worst facility the Commission had seen. He added that the detention centre on Christmas Island should be closed. (*Sydney Morning Herald, 24 October*)

More funding for multicultural mental health in Tasmania

State Health Minister Lara Giddings announced more Government funding to support migrants and refugee families who are survivors of torture and trauma. The Tasmanian Government has allocated \$50,000 in total to the Migrant Resource Centres in Launceston and Hobart to provide early intervention mental health support. (*Tasmanian Government press release, 22 October*)

World Youth Day pilgrims seek asylum in Australia

186 World Youth Day pilgrims have sought asylum in Australia, the Department of Immigration and Citizenship has reported. Of these, 11 applications have been refused and two accepted. The remainder are currently under consideration. (*News Ltd., 21 October*)

Australia assists East Timor deal with asylum seekers

Federal police and Immigration officials will assist their East Timorese counterparts interview asylum seekers caught using the country as a staging post to Australia. The 20 men to be interviewed, 16 Sri Lankans and four Indonesians, were questioned as to whether they were part of a wider people smuggling ring. (*The West Australian, 22 October*)

Immigration Ombudsman hands down damning report into detention

A report by the Immigration Ombudsman looking into the cases of 25 long-stay immigration detainees has been tabled in Federal Parliament. The report provides chilling reading of the horrific experiences endured by our longest serving detainees. (*West Australia Today, 19 October*)

Asylum seekers thrown overboard off Italian coast

Italian police arrested five Nigerian traffickers accused of throwing 13 asylum seekers off their boat because of fears that they had brought bad luck. The 12 victims from Nigeria and one from Ghana are presumed dead. The five men arrested were accused of aggravated multiple murder. (*News Ltd., 14 October*)

Boat arrivals no reason to reverse policy changes

Director of the Victorian Foundation for Survivors of Torture, Paris Aristotle, reflects on the psychological and emotional damaged caused by previous immigration policies and argues that the recent arrival of two boats carrying a total of 30 asylum seekers was no reason to reverse recent positive changes to asylum policy in Australia. (*The Age, 13 October*)

Indonesian captain charged with people smuggling

The captain of the boat recently intercepted off the Ashmore Islands carrying 12 people has been charged by the Australian Federal Police with people-smuggling offences under the Migration Act. Senator Evans says the Australian Government will take all steps possible to ensure the people behind people smuggling are brought to justice. (*Radio Australia, 10 October*)

Rudd's multicultural policy 'opaque'

Liberal MP Petro Georgiou has been critical of the Rudd Government for not correcting the policies of the previous Howard Government by retaining the citizenship test and he said that more effort was needed to ensure all people had effective and equitable access to key programs and services. He also called for the establishment of an independent statutory body reporting to the Prime Minister on issues of multiculturalism, migrants and refugees. (*The Age, 10 October*)

Aid agencies hit by global turmoil

International aid agencies including the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) are feeling the effects of international economic crises. UNHCR has warned that the financial crisis was

increasing pressure on the agency's capacity to provide humanitarian aid to the world's refugees. With the global number of displaced persons rising and costs of food, energy and transport increasing, UNHCR and other agencies are finding it challenging to meet increased demand. Funds drawn from the agency's operational reserve for emergencies rose from \$34 million in 2006 to more than \$87 million in 2007, with an expected \$150 million this year. (*Epoch Times*, 9 October)

Asylum seekers prefer jail to detention, inquiry told

A federal parliamentary inquiry has been told that Australia's immigration detention system is the worst in the Western world. Refugee support groups addressing the inquiry have said that many of their clients believed they would receive better treatment, conditions and preparation for employment in the prison system. (*ABC News Online*, 9 October)

Boat people could stay if they can prove persecution

Recent unauthorised arrivals who make asylum claims could be successful if their claims are based on persecution because of their ethnic minority, but may not be able to make an argument that they are fleeing fighting and unrest in Afghanistan between the Taliban and NATO troops. (*The West Australian*, 8 October)

People smuggler threat feared

Immigration Minister Senator Chris Evans has indicated that the two boats carrying unauthorised arrivals recently intercepted off Australia's coastline could be linked. While Senator Evans has conceded that people smuggling operators could be testing Australia's changed policies he has rejected claims that the two boats signal a new wave of arrivals. UNHCR spokesperson Arianne Rummery has said the two boat arrivals are very small compared with the international context. (*The West Australian*, 8 October)

Low asylum figures for Indonesia belie 'new wave of boat people' claim

UNHCR has indicated there has been little change to the number of people seeking asylum in Indonesia in the last two years, contrary to the claim by opposition immigration spokesperson Sharman Stone that the Rudd Government's new policies will encourage an increase in people smuggling and unauthorised arrivals. Refugee Council of Australia President John Gibson has said the low number of asylum seekers indicated that there were not "masses of people coming to Indonesia ready to jump on the next boat". (*The Australian*, 6 October)

Another refugee boat found in Timor Sea

A group of 17 people who are believed to be of Middle Eastern background have been intercepted in Australian waters and will be transported to Christmas Island for initial processing. Immigration Minister, Senator Chris Evans has said that the reason for their voyage is unknown at this time. (*The Age*, 6 October)

Christmas Island arrivals prompt asylum warning

Following the interception by the Australian Navy of 12 boat passengers and two crew members who have been taken to Christmas Island for processing, opposition immigration spokesperson Sharman Stone has warned that the arrivals could be the first of many. In a change from previous arrangements, the boat arrivals will be provided with access to lawyers prior to making any claims for protection. Immigration Minister Senator Chris Evans has said that none of the arrivals will be detained at the new immigration detention centre, but will remain in community-housing on the island while assessment takes place. (*The Australian*, 2 October)

Navy escorts boat with 14 people to Christmas Island

Immigration Minister Senator Chris Evans has said that a boat has been intercepted by the Australian Navy near the Ashmore Island carrying two crew members and 12 other people. The people will be taken to Christmas Island where they will undergo health, security and identity checks. (*The Australian*, 30 September)

Racism rampant: Refugees and migrants lose out on jobs and housing

At a recent community meeting, Dandenong's African community voiced concerns that they were being denied access to rental properties and local jobs because of racism. A local legal service has received

growing complaints about refugees making application for rental housing only to be told the property was already taken, but would later find the real estate agent continuing to advertise for tenants. (*Dandenong Leader*, 29 September)

40 per cent believe others don't belong here

A study has unearthed significant levels of racism in Australia with 40 per cent of Australians believing that some ethnic groups should not be living in Australia. Professor Kevin Dunn from the University of Western Sydney has said that the groups who were most often highlighted in the research were people of Islamic background or those from the Middle East. The research will also recommend strategies to lower Australia's level of racist views, which he said remained low by international standards. (*The Australian*, 28 September)

Return of Papuan refugees does not undermine original refugee decision.

Refugee Council of Australia President John Gibson has said that the voluntary return of two Papuan refugees to their homeland does not undermine the original decision by the Australian Government to grant refugee status to 43 West Papuan asylum seekers in 2006. (*RNZI*, 26 September)

EU ministers back plan on immigration and asylum

The European Pact on Immigration and Asylum has been formally backed by a meeting of EU Interior Ministers in Brussels. The plan will require that people seeking asylum will need to apply for asylum before entering EU territory, but also incorporates a commitment to additional aid and assistance to refugee-producing countries. (*EU Observer*, 25 September)

Burma releases political prisoners

The recent release of 9002 political prisoners by the Burmese military regime has been an effort to appease the international community, according to local activists. Democratic leader Aung San Suu Kyi remains under house arrest and Amnesty International estimates that 2100 political activists remain in jail. Charm Tong, spokeswoman from the Shan Women's Action Group, also opposes Australian aid to Burma arguing that it only assists the military regime further. "The regime is still continuing its systematic human rights abuses and that is still causing refugees. This is the same regime that shot and killed monks and denied people aid after Cyclone Nargis," she said. (*The Australian*, 25 September)

Island nation president plans for extinction – sea level rise may produce Pacific Islander refugees

The President of Kiribati, Anote Tong is developing a plan to gradually relocate his 100,000 citizens to other countries around the world with job training and employment programs to assist them in their settlement. President Tong believes this approach will be more palatable to other countries as scientists have predicted that a sea level rise of up to half a metre will submerge a significant proportion of the island nation in addition to increasing the salinity of the water table, making even more of the land uninhabitable and unusable. (*Harvard Gazette*, 25 September)

Solitary confinement will cost you extra

Julian Burnside QC has revealed that, in addition to former detainees incurring debts for accommodation, food, and transport between detention facilities, people have also been charged additional costs (including GST) for time spent in solitary confinement. Mr Burnside has said that several detainees have received bills for up to \$250,000 and one recently received a bill for \$512,000. (*Crikey*, 25 September)

Papuan leader concerned over pair

The leader of 43 Papuans granted asylum by Australia in 2006 says he is concerned about the long-term safety of two refugees who have chosen to return to West Papua. He said that, while all refugees would ultimately like to return to their homes, they feel unable to do so until their situation is safe. He also said that the decision of the two refugees to return was a deeply personal one and that both had families who were living unprotected in West Papua. (*AAP*, 25 September)

Not good enough, says Liberal MP, of children in detention

Liberal MP Petro Georgiou, has accused the Department of Immigration of contravening its commitment to keeping children out of detention. While there were currently 12 children living freely in the community, there were two in residential housing projects where their movements are restricted and

are closely monitored by staff. Mr Georgiou also criticised the Department's failure to set up a commission within the office of the Ombudsman to monitor detainees' health — a recommendation from the 2005 Palmer inquiry. (*The Age*, 25 September)

Diplomats urge protection in Sri Lanka

US Assistant Secretary of State Richard Boucher says that 200,000 people are now estimated to be displaced in Sri Lanka and the number is growing. Together with the international community, he has urged Sri Lanka's government and Tamil Tiger separatists to protect civilians caught in the crossfire. (*AP*, 24 September)

16 months in Baxter detention centre: that'll cost you \$160,000

A former asylum seeker who is living in Australia on a spouse visa has been issued with a bill for over \$160,000 for his time spent in immigration detention. A Department of Immigration spokesperson has said that as of 30 June 2008, there were 386 persons with active detention debts amounting to \$7,705,576. Immigration Minister Senator Chris Evans has responded by saying that he is seeking advice on this issue. "Any changes to the detention debt framework will be part of the Government's broad strategic overhaul of immigration detention policy," he said. (*Crikey*, 24 September)

Detention centre row

A parliamentary committee has blamed the Department of Finance for a \$120 million blow-out in the cost of the Christmas Island Detention Centre. West Australian Labor senator Mark Bishop has said that, "as a result of incompetence ... taxpayers are stuck with a bill for an extra \$120 million." (*The Age*, 24 September)

Villawood 'left lawless' by police

Professor John McMillan, the Commonwealth Ombudsman has raised concerns about incidents of violence including stabbings and other assaults that occurred at Villawood Immigration Detention Centre. Concerns centre around which police agency is responsible for addressing the incidents and whether oversight for the centre rests with the NSW Police or the Australian Federal Police. In the past two years there have been 86 assaults in the centre, five incidents of grievous bodily harm and 34 incidences of self-harm. (*The Age*, 24 September)

Australian Embassy claims Iraqi fraud

Spokesperson for the Australian Embassy in Jordan, Tania Wilson says it rejects about 1,000 out of the 4,500 Iraqi resettlement applications submitted in Jordan and Syria every year due to fraud. Ms Wilson also said that measures were being discussed by a number of Western nations to tighten the process to minimise fraud, but declined to elaborate on what the measures would involve. (*AP*, 21 September)

Asylum seekers' misery revealed

A new report *Human Rights Overboard* has revealed stories of asylum seekers who were kept in detention for longer than required and were subject to cruel and degrading treatment. The report also shows that over 30% of primary decisions of the Immigration Department were overturned by the Refugee Review Tribunal. The report is based on testimony provided to a 'people's inquiry' held in 2005 and heard stories of poor conditions in detention centres as well as the psychological suffering of both detainees and employees. (*Sydney Morning Herald*, 19 September)

Ombudsman lent an ear on detainees

Speaking at a recent inquiry into immigration detention, Commonwealth Ombudsman John McMillan made an admission that his recommendations were often ignored in the past. In reviewing the cases of long-term detainees, the Ombudsman often made recommendations that detainees be released in to community care or receive specialist counselling services but that "there was a disappointing response in the past." Professor McMillan also said that the current Government has been more responsive, but that recent policy changes should also include work rights and social security benefits for those released into the community. (*The Age*, 17 September)

Detention centre guards talk of violence

ABC TV's *Four Corners* program has heard stories from former guards and employees of Australia's Immigration detention centres of a culture of violence and deplorable treatment of both guards and

detainees. Four Corners reported there were at least 62 cases of post-traumatic stress disorder and other mental disabilities among former officers. *(Sydney Morning Herald, 16 September)*

Enthusiasm wanes for Labor's pledge on Islands

Despite making significant changes to Australian immigration policy since being elected, the Federal Government has made no steps towards returning 'excised' island to Australia's migration zone. David Manne, co-ordinator of the Refugee and Immigration Legal Centre, said the Government's lack of action on the excision zone was a "radical aberration" from its campaign of reform. *(The Age, 15 September)*

\$800,000 to fight racism

The ACT Minister for Multicultural Affairs, John Hargreaves have pledged \$800,000 to tackle racism affecting refugees and migrants and improve services to help refugees and migrants gain access to employment and training. Some of the funding will also go towards English language tuition services and transitional housing projects. *(The Canberra Times, 14 September)*

Losers all round in detention

While the devastating impacts of immigration detention on asylum seekers and refugees are well known and have been well documented, serious issues are also emerging about the impact on those who have worked in Australia's immigration detention system. Former guards and detention centre workers have spoken up about their experiences with many now suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder related their time working in detention facilities. *(Sydney Morning Herald, 13 September)*

Migrants should never be pushed apart

Canadian researcher, Professor Morton Beiser, speaking at an international mental health conference has warned against dispersing different groups of migrants and refugees throughout the community, as this may have a negative impact on their settlement and integration into Australian society. Professor Beiser's longitudinal research has shown that migrant and refugee groups gain essential support and settlement assistance from within their own ethnic communities, preventing social isolation. *(The Age, 13 September)*

Martin Place becomes humble home for refugees

The international aid group Medecins Sans Frontieres - Doctors without Borders - set up a mock refugee camp in Sydney's Martin Place to illustrate the experiences of refugees fleeing countries such as Iraq and Afghanistan. The project is aimed to raise awareness about the conditions in refugee camps and to educate the general public and school children about the issues facing refugees. *(ABC News Online, 13 September)*

Far-right British politician plans tour

The anti-Asian Australian Protectionist Party, a breakaway from the Australia First Party, is sponsoring a planned speaking tour by the Chairman of the British National Party, Nick Griffin. Mr. Griffin was previously prosecuted for incitement to racial hatred and plans to speak in Australia about "the experiences of the British National Party in their fight to protect Britain and its people from the demographic genocide that is threatening their homeland, caused by the large-scale immigration of people from the Third World." In 1998, Mr Griffin was denied entry to Australia and Immigration Minister, Senator Chris Evans has said that all visa applicants must satisfy the character test of the Migration Act including provisions to ensure that a non-citizen will not vilify or incite discord in the Australian community. *(Canberra Times, 11 September)*

Queensland to better refugee settlement service

The release of a report *New Future: The Queensland government's engagement with African Refugees* that found that the almost 5000 refugees from Africa who had settled in Queensland in the last five years had experienced oppressive and abusive regimes and required greater assistance to settle in their new community. Queensland Premier Anna Bligh has said that the Government would invest more in education programs and access to translators, work placements and cross-cultural training would be improved in all government departments. *(Sydney Morning Herald, 10 September)*